Collaborative work in translation education: 
A case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

Ever since translation studies became an independent academic discipline, theoretical approaches in this field have progressed rapidly. The same can be said for translation teaching methods. However, in some countries the traditional “hand-me-down” approach to teaching activities still prevails, the one in which translation educators and trainers and student translators are on the opposite sides. The academic community has been urged to rethink its approaches to translation education and scholars have emphasized that translator educators and curricula developers need to attempt to break these traditional roles and work on new and innovative pedagogical approaches to translation (Kiraly 2000a, 2000b; Baer and Koby 2003; Durban et al., 2003; Calvo, 2011; Kelly, 2014).

In a financially under-resourced academic environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (Jabić, 2016), modern language faculties and translation educators need to address these approaches bearing in mind the limitations they face on a regular basis, which mainly stem from the lack of funds as well as from the absence of translation education institutions in the country (Hadžiahmetović and Pavlović, 2016). Along with all the key players such as translation agencies and other prospective employers, they need to design and practice such activities that would ‘equip’ prospective graduates to successfully face the challenges of their future tasks.

The article examines the practical application of in-class collaborative translation activities at an institution of higher education in BiH, partially following Kiraly’s model of introducing authentic experiential work in translation education (2005, 2012, 2013) by means of collaborative educational experience. It explores the main features of collaborative vs. individual translation, highlighting translation problems and solutions as well as the quality of such translation. The objective is to examine the usability of collaborative work in the current institutional practices and its further upgrade and incorporation in translation classrooms. Without any intention to generalize the results of the study, this article shows how small-scale research may be utilized to provide insights into specific elements of translation pedagogical practices within this particular institution and to promote similar research among translation scholars in BiH.

Key words: collaborative work, translation education, individual translation, translation educators
1. Introduction

Although not new, the term collaboration has been increasingly fashionable in translation research in recent years. The rapid development of the Internet introduced translation to a new scenario characterized by “the speed of communications and the complexity of having a higher number of agents interacting with each other” (Costales, 2016: 1). It is precisely this characteristic of multiple participants in translation that provides a number of approaches to research that cover a string of possible topics for discussion, from literature regarding the translation process to translation technology and education.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), as an under-resourced academic environment, traditionally lacks translation education institutions. That is why modern language faculties are expected to take an active role in educating prospective translators and make sure that their graduates are prepared for their future professional challenges. Bearing in mind the lack of resources, translation educators and scholars in this country need to invest their efforts in devising activities that would change the often-used teacher-centered approach and help their prospective graduates to develop positive attitudes to translation education tasks.

Over the last few years, small-scale research studies have been conducted on the translation courses taught at the English Language Department, Tuzla University. The main aim of such studies has been to define the strengths and weaknesses of the programs offered, including course and syllabus design as well as individual, task-oriented activities (Pavlović, 2013; Hadžiahmetović Jurida and Pavlović, 2016; Pavlović, Hanić, and Hadžiahmetović Jurida, 2018). These research activities are seen as the tool that might help change the rooted hand-me-down paradigm within this institutional learning environment in which translation educators are seen as central figures in the classroom. The paper reports on a part of a larger research study conducted with the aim of examining collaborative translation activities in translation classroom.

2. Literature review

As Alfer (2017: 275) states, in recent years collaboration has emerged as a “buzzword in translation circles”. With the advent of new technologies and translation mediated through the web, collaborative translation processes nowadays mean online collaborative practices such as crowdsourcing, fansubbing, gaming, software localization, thus changing the world of translation. Jiménez-Crespo (2017: 5) emphasizes that
scholars from different perspectives have started to realize the need for increased theoretical and practical analysis of group processes in all types of translation activities.

2.1 Collaboration in translation - past practices

Collaboration in translation involves as Alfer (2017: 276) says “a myriad of both human and textual stakeholders in the translation process” and is “anything but a recent, let alone new phenomenon.” References to collaboration in translation are certainly not a new thing. Earlier instances of collaborative translation were primarily used in literature to explain the emergence and translation of religious texts, literary works of art, and scientific texts involving Greek, Latin, Arabic, and some other languages. Collaborative effort in both, writing as well as translating, is referred to through the prism of authorship, a significant if not the key feature in discussions of this concept (Bistué, 2017: 37-38). According to Jansen and Wegener (2013: 4), literary criticism has long reflected on the notion that literary creation is by no means a solitary activity, but rather co-operative if not actually collaborative. In line with these instances come the common models of collaboration in translation that can be divided into three general types: collaboration between a translator and the author; collaboration between the author and a group of translators, each working in a different language; and collaboration between two or more translators working on the same text, translating into the same language (Zielinska-Elliott and Kaminka, 2017: 169).

Definitions of the labour of translation currently include many activities that have not been considered to be translation in the traditional sense of the term, to the extent that in current usage, “collaborative risks become a synonym for notions such as social, transaction, production, or even relation itself” (Cordingley and Frigau Manning, 2017: 4), as they affect not only the concept of authorship but also the multiple parties in the social network such as the writer, the translator, and the publishing institution. These new activities may affect the roles of prospective translators in the translation market to the extent where they no longer would be required to serve as intermediaries between source text/culture and target text/culture but to be what Cordingley and Frigau Manning (2017: 4) call “an active node in an evolving and dynamic web.”

Collaborative translation practices have been receiving increased scholarly attention in recent years and have also given rise to attempts to conceptualize translation as an inherently collaborative phenomenon (Alfer, 2017: 275). Bistué, 2017: 45) states that today, scholars may want to incorporate the forgotten practice of collaborative translation into their
histories. As Cordingley and Frigau Manning claim (2017: 15), contemporary interest in collaborative dynamics encourages translation scholars to “redefine past practices” and offer new insights into this concept.

2.2 Collaboration in translation - contemporary views

Apart from the literature-oriented investigations of collaboration in translations, scholars have also addressed this issue from the perspective of translation process research, modern technology, and education. In the early days of translation process research, it was introspective methods such as verbal reports recorded in think-aloud protocols (TAPs) that were mainly applied in translation process research (House, 1988, 2000). More recently, new tools such as keystroke logging software, screen recording and eye tracking as well as cognitive approaches have opened up new research lines (Lee-Jahnke, 2005; Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow, 2011). The development, achievements and limitations of TAP have been discussed in the literature (see Kussmaul, 1991, 1995; Tirkkonen-Condit, 2000). Protocols involving more than one person have been termed joint translation protocols. Pavlović (2007: 46) proposes a common term for the method: ‘collaborative translation protocols’ (CTPs). These protocols are a product of collaborative translation tasks in which a pair or group of people translate the same source text together, basing their decisions on mutual consensus. In such tasks, the understanding of the ST meaning and the creation of the target text (TT) occur after individual cognitive processing and the interaction among the members of the group. Pavlović (2007: 45) concludes that naturally occurring instances of collaborative translation, that is, translation involving more than one person working jointly on the same ST, would thus provide a possible source of authentic data.

The advent of the Internet and technology created a new discourse which alters the definition of collaborative translation. New technologies gave impetus to exchange of information among people, facilitating the transfer of knowledge as well as to the procedures followed at large translation agencies, which have also reshaped their translate-edit-proofread practices. As Costales states (2016: 4), professional practice of translation faces a dynamic and complex scenario, which inevitably includes collaboration. As “the ultimate goal of translation education in institutions of higher learning is providing an entry to a professional community of practice” (Jiménez-Crespo, 2017: 228), the academia also needs to take an active role (Jääskeläinen, Kujamäki and Mäkisalo, 2011).
by researching such practices and incorporating them in their curricula when needed.

In emphasizing the need to move away from teacher-oriented activities, still applicable in certain undergraduate programs (Kelly, 2014), some scholars have specifically addressed collaborative translation in education. Although “translator training has evolved, not only alongside Translation Studies as a discipline and alongside linguistics […], but also with educational approaches in general (from teacher-centered to student-centered), it is still possible to find variations on the traditional model in translator training courses today” (Kelly, 2014: 11). The conventional trial-and-error approach to teaching, or as Kiraly (2005: 1100) calls it the ‘who’ll take the next sentence’ approach, is criticized as being “perhaps the key obstacle to the development of a dynamic pedagogical culture in the domain of translator education (ibid.).

Kiraly’s works (1995, 2000a, 2000b) point to the turn towards collaborative approach to translator training. In Kiraly’s words (2000b: 60), “[l]earning is best accomplished through meaningful interaction with peers as well as full-fledged members of the community to which learners are seeking entry. As Kelly (2014: 102) suggests, teamwork has been seen as useful and positive in translator training for several reasons. Apart from educational research showing that collaborative learning is richer and more effective, teamwork is an important social and personal experience for students, which results in interpersonal skills that are not only an important element of professional translator activity, but also an essential generic skill in much demand by employers.

Kiraly (2013: 213) emphasizes that each participant in any collaborative process of translation (and this includes all translation processes) also influences every other participant. His model (2013: 214) calls into question conventional didactic models in which learning is largely the result of teaching where a teacher is understood to transmit knowledge, skills or competence to learners. His model also highlights the value of collaborative interaction in the learning process and of a reassessment of teachers’ roles in the classroom – away from distributors of knowledge, and towards those of assistants, guides, facilitators and advisors. Adopting a view of translator competence as an emergent process, Kiraly (2013: 215) offers an innovative step towards improving and refining collaborative, learner-centered approaches to translator education.

Researchers have been increasingly active in calling for changes in practices in translation education so as to better adapt them to rapidly changing market needs. A need for closer connection between what happens in the classroom and actual professional practice has been a common standpoint in translation studies for over two decades (see
Chesterman and Wagner, 2002; Kiraly, 2005; Klimkowski, 2006; Jääskeläinen, Kujamäki and Mäkisalo, 2011; Pym 2011; Way 2014). Translation educators and researchers have been seeking alternatives that will be better suited to the needs of students and employers against the “backdrop of the radically changed market conditions over the past half century” (Kiraly 2005: 1098). As Baer and Koby write:

[…] We may hope to better prepare students for the workplace by offering them appropriate tools, but if our teaching methodology is of the traditional kind […] we may fail to produce translators who are capable of the flexibility, teamwork and problem-solving that are essential for success in the contemporary language industry (2003: vii-viii).

In line with the above, observation of interaction and learning in situated translation projects within educational settings is seen as a potentially viable approach for investigating various aspects of translation education. As Kiraly (2005: 1110) states, “it may also help us break the stranglehold of the ‘who’ll take the next sentence’ teaching technique on translator education.” In a broader spectrum, it is hoped that such discussion will contribute to a reassessment of existing and emerging pedagogical approaches with a view toward improving their coherence, consistency and cogency (Kiraly, 2012: 93). Likewise, Kiraly (2016) believes that new research should encourage translator educators incorporate authentic experiential learning into their teaching.

3. Methodology

The study aimed at examining actual collaborative work in translation teaching, focusing on aspects such as the characteristics of collaborative and individual work, and the potential implementation of such work in future classroom translation activities. Two non-technical, general-language STs were chosen, one in English and one in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS). Both STs were up to 140 words long and both were excerpts from travel guides. The English ST was taken from a guide to Ireland - a short story about the history of the Welsh language while the BCS ST was from a guide to Tuzla, created as a book with photographs. The texts were chosen based on the potential of their actual usage in the translation industry in the BiH market. In the central part of the study, the subjects were asked to fill out a pre-translation questionnaire which comprised questions about the students’ practical experience in translation prior to this task; main difficulties they encountered prior to
their preferences between individual and collaborative translation and direction of translation, as well as the satisfaction with their knowledge of English and B-C-S. They then collaboratively translated two STs: one into their mother tongue (L1 translation) and the other into English (L2 translation), without time limitation. This was followed by a post-translation questionnaire with questions probing their perception of the entire activity, difficulty of the task, satisfaction with the activities and the translations made, as well as the relations in the team during the group translation activities. The collaborative sessions were audio-recorded, the collaborative translation protocols obtained from the sessions were transcribed and coded. The TTs (the translations) were collected and given to the external evaluator for evaluation.

Control translation tasks were conducted with a set of comparable subjects, also student translators, who were asked to translate the same two STs individually at home. The students were instructed to accompany their translations with Integrated Problem and Decision Reports (IPDRs), the term coined by Gile (2004), which represent additional notes made by the translator on the translation task. These notes include the problems the translators experienced while doing the task, the tentative solutions, and the resources consulted. The control-group subjects were asked to fill out the same pre- and post-translation questionnaires (except for the questions related to group activities) that were used in the main research study. Their translations were evaluated according to the same criteria as the translations from the main group. The data from the Integrated Problem and Decision Reports were used to supplement additional information.

All the participants in the collaborative translation protocols were student translators, there were 13 third year students, divided into three groups of three and one group of four. Another 11 subjects (eight third year and three fourth year students) took part in the control research study aimed at comparing collaborative and individual translation. The subjects were native speakers of B-C-S. Their previous experience with translation in the educational setting had included mainly individual work (in class and at home) and very limited collaborative work usually in pairs. The subjects were not assigned to groups but used self-selection (Pavlović, 2007: 70).

An external evaluator was chosen to do the evaluation of the TTs obtained in the translation tasks. The evaluator was asked to evaluate the translations in both directions. She was not acquainted with the aims of the study or how the translations were produced (in terms of collaborative or individual works). She was sent anonymous translations and instructed to evaluate the translations using red and yellow cards (following Pavlović,
2007). Red cards were used to mark parts of the TTs considered unacceptable either because they distort what the evaluator perceives to be the plausible interpretation of the ST, or because they contain an unambiguous target language error (of whatever kind) and as such could not be published. Yellow cards were used to indicate parts of the TTs that could be revised in any way. These would be the parts of the TTs that were good enough but could benefit from improvement or editing. In other words, the evaluator could perhaps think of an option that was more idiomatic, more readable, more conforming to target usage norms, etc. To facilitate quantitative comparison, red cards were counted as one negative point and yellow cards as half a negative point. The negative points were summed up allowing for the calculation of the revisability scores (the higher the score the lower the quality of the translated texts). The group and the individual scores were then compared.

Questionnaires were used to collect data on participants’ previous experiences in translation, their attitudes towards individual and collaborative work, and the relations and atmosphere in their teams during collaborative work. We measured (on a 1-5 numerical scale) the subjects’ satisfaction with their product and their enjoyment in the process as well as their attitudes to group interaction (the atmosphere and relations during the teamwork and the contribution of group members to the final version of translation, etc.). We counted the number of problems, tentative solutions, spontaneous solutions, solutions from external sources, red and yellow cards, and revisability scores. Additional comments given by the participants were also processed, which allowed for the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

4. Results and discussion

Since the study focused on potential in-class usage of collaborative translation, the translation process included problem-solving (Tirkkonen-Condit, 2000) in both the collaborative and individual translation tasks. For that purpose, translation problems were understood (as defined by Livbjerg and Mees, 2003: 129) as any word or phrase in the text for which the participants expressed any degree of doubt about the proper translation.

4.1 Translation problems

The transcribed collaborative translation protocols and the data from the subjects’ IPDRs was analysed and grouped into shared problem areas:
orthographic, morphological, lexico-semantic, syntactic, and textual (following Pavlović, 2007). The size of the problems varied according to group, individual as well as the direction of translation. In the collaborative translation tasks, the number of problems registered in L1 translation ranged from 53 (Group 2) to 62 (Group 1), while the number of problems registered in L2 translation ranged from 46 (Group 4) to 70 (Group 3). For the control group (individual work), the number of problems was significantly lower. The problems ranged from 2 (Individual 1) to 10 (Individual 11) in L1 translation and from 1 (Individuals 1 and 3) to 12 (Individual 11) in L2 translation (Graph 1).

Most of the translation problems in individual work were lexico-semantic, followed by orthographical and syntactic problems. Morphological and textual problems were not reported. The comparative analysis of problems encountered in both collaborative and individual translation tasks clearly showed that these two methods differed in the number of problems encountered. For example, as the collaborative translation protocol transcripts show, morphological problems were identified and solved in collaborative tasks through participants’ communication and discussion of morphological rules, which developed into exchange of ideas and knowledge. Indeed, the higher number of all types of problems identified during collaborative translation tasks can be linked to the very nature of collaborative work that fosters interaction.

4.2 Solutions to translation problems

Another segment in the focus of the research study included the solutions offered by the participants. They were divided into:
• tS: tentative solutions (proposed as a possible way for dealing with the problem defined and characterized by participants’ uncertainty that it might be the appropriate solution),
• spont.: spontaneous solutions (proposed as a result of the knowledge of the participants, characterized by participants’ confidence in their suggestions), and
• extern.: from external sources (found in dictionaries, glossaries, etc).

The number of tentative solutions in collaborative work ranged from 121 to 167 for L1 translation and from 80 to 177 for L2 translation. The groups considered up to 23 tentative solutions per problem in L1 translation and up to 20 solutions per problem in L2 translation. In all groups and in both directions, the number of spontaneous solutions was much higher than the number of solutions found in external resources, which indicates that the participants relied more on the knowledge and ideas of group members rather than formal sources such as dictionaries and glossaries. Graph 2 shows group average data.

Graph 2: Solutions – collaborative translation

The analysis of solutions provided by the subjects who translated the texts individually was affected by the type and quality of the data obtained from IPDRs and questionnaires. The data proved to be rather limited due to the very nature of individual work which lacks the elements of interaction and verbalization. The number of tentative solutions per problem in L1 translation ranged from 1 to 3, while in L2 translation, this number ranged from 1 to 1.7. The average values of spontaneous solutions per problem in both directions of translation are lower than

![Graph 2: Solutions – collaborative translation](image-url)
those for external solutions, which indicates that the subjects mainly relied on external sources when they encountered translation problems (Graph 3). Individual subjects did not consider as many options as the subjects who participated in the collaborative translation tasks, which is in line with the statements that collaborative settings allow for natural verbalization instances while individual translators may not report on all the instances of their work (Pavlović, 2007).

4.3 Revisability score

When we compare the revisability score figures calculated by summing up red and yellow cards, in L1 translation the subjects who participated in collaborative work got a lower number of red but a higher number of yellow cards than the subjects who translated individually. As a result, their revisability score (2.87) was slightly lower (meaning better) than for the individuals (3.18). The situation was completely the same for L2 translation where the revisability scores was 6.37 for collaborative translation and 6.90 for individual translation.

The data presented in Graph 4 show the average values, which indicate only a slight tendency for the subjects who participated in collaborative work to achieve better results. This means that collaboratively translated TTs contained fewer unacceptable parts than the individual translations. However, as no statistically significant difference was evident, the link between collaborative work and the quality of translation should be investigated further and with larger samples.
4.4 Collaborative work - student translators’ perspective

The analysis of the transcribed data as well as the data from post-translation questionnaires revealed a rather positive overall experience among the participants in collaborative work. The relaxed atmosphere confirmed by instances of jokes and laughter in the recorded material as well as the satisfaction these participants expressed when filling out the questionnaires support this claim. The additional comments that the participants provided shed more light on the overall perception of collaboration in translation.

The analysis of the participants’ answers to the questions “Are you satisfied with your final translation” and “Did you enjoy working on this translation?” showed that the subjects were rather satisfied with their final translation as the group average for L1 translation was 4.29 and for L2 translation 4.22. Very high average values for the level of enjoyment in the task (4.91 for L1 translation and 4.93 for L2 translation) showed that the subjects experienced the tasks as positive and pleasant.

A detailed analysis of the atmosphere and relations during the teamwork was conducted, based on the answers to the questions such as “How would you describe the atmosphere and relations in the team during the translation task?”, “Do you feel that the other members of the team did their share of work?” and “Did you feel you had the opportunity to say what you wanted?”. The results showed that the relations in the teams were cooperative (the average value 4.29) and that the atmosphere
was particularly creative (the average value 4.52). In their opinion, their team members did their share of work (the average value 4.53) and most of them felt they had the opportunity to express their ideas (the average value 4.54).

The participants were also provided with the option to write whatever additional comments they had about translating in groups. The comments in which they state that in such type of activity they “can learn more” and that they “should have more activities of this type” clearly signal positive perception of the entire task. Group work was “more fun and relaxed”, with cooperation among team members frequently mentioned: “reaching a compromise” and “listening to other people’s opinion”. Students also addressed the issues of reaching a compromise and democratically deciding on translation solutions.

The participants also mentioned the disadvantages of such practice, pointing mainly to the longer time needed for the completion of the task as well as instances of competitive spirit that at times prevailed and prevented them from finding the final version sooner. Some participants drew the attention to time-management emphasizing this aspect of the activity as being negative at times as “too much discussion prevented” them from reaching the final decision sooner.

When asked to pinpoint the major points of difference between translation tasks that they are usually involved in-class and the collaborative activity they performed, student translators highlighted the communication aspect of the group activity, finding the atmosphere much more relaxing, with each participant having their own ideas whilst at the same time listening to what others have to say.

The findings of the study, although limited in scope in terms of the number of subjects, point to the fact that collaborative translation in an institutional learning environment may be used to examine group dynamics of student translators and the influence of such learning environment on problem-solving activities. Although collaborative translation protocol and IPDR data are very different in nature and cannot be directly compared, this difference may not be the only reason for such a high discrepancy between the number of problems encountered. It may be assumed that some problems in individual work were not verbalized due to the nature of work, but it cannot be ruled out that some passed unnoticed. However, bearing in mind the sample size, this needs to be examined further using additional qualitative research methods such as post-activity interviews.

To conclude, the collaborative working environment in this study had a positive psychological impact in terms of feeling less pressure, being relaxed, counting on support from others, and developing social skills. In
addition, the results of this study indicate that collaborative work may improve the development of problem-solving skills and help create a positive attitude of student translators towards the translation activities in the classroom.

5. Afterword

Kiraly (2016: 9) acknowledges the virtual absence of significant teacher training for translator educators worldwide. While doing so, he urges translator educators to reflect on their own understandings of what it means to know, to learn and to teach as they set out to educate translators competently and wisely in this still new millennium. “Starting with observations of what actually goes on in our own classrooms, followed by systematic plans and actions for change, we can create a groundswell of local research that can inform our common search for alternative teaching methods and techniques” (Kiraly, 2003: 25).

The results of the study indicate that collaborative and individual translations performed within this institutional setting exhibit differences in terms of problems and their solutions. Student translators involved in collaborative translation encountered more problems and registered a significantly higher number of solutions than those who worked individually. This can be attributed to the previously mentioned setting of collaborative translation which urges subjects to interact. The quality of the final products for collaborative translation was not significantly higher when compared to individual translation, which signals the need for more studies into translation quality in collaborative educational settings.

Emphasizing the absence of training for translator educators as well as translation teaching institutions in the context of the BiH academic reality, this article hopes to provide but a small insight into the way classroom activities may be designed so as to follow Kirali’s directions. It is hoped that the study may be of use to translator educators who have not yet explored the possibility of incorporating collaborative work into their teaching. In line with Kiraly’s (2016: 9) statement, the study may serve as a starting point for further research into authentic experiential work in translation education as well as to the incorporation of authentic experiential learning in translation classrooms.

As collaboration in translation practice and education is still a relatively unexplored terrain in BiH, more research needs to focus on such practices in translation teaching. Attention may be directed towards the effect collaborative activities may have on increasing translation skills as well as developing interpersonal skills. Further studies may focus on the potential
of collaborative work as a learning tool and the usability of such in-class activity in building the group work experience, which would be a valuable asset for our prospective students in their future careers. In addition, research interest revolving around translators’ impressions of the entire activity may help translation educators in designing effective and interesting activities. This may provide a better understanding of the ways in which translation education can benefit from collaborative practices and help translation scholars and educators assess if collaboration can become a suitable setting for fostering the acquisition of translation competence.

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